



Recovering from a disaster

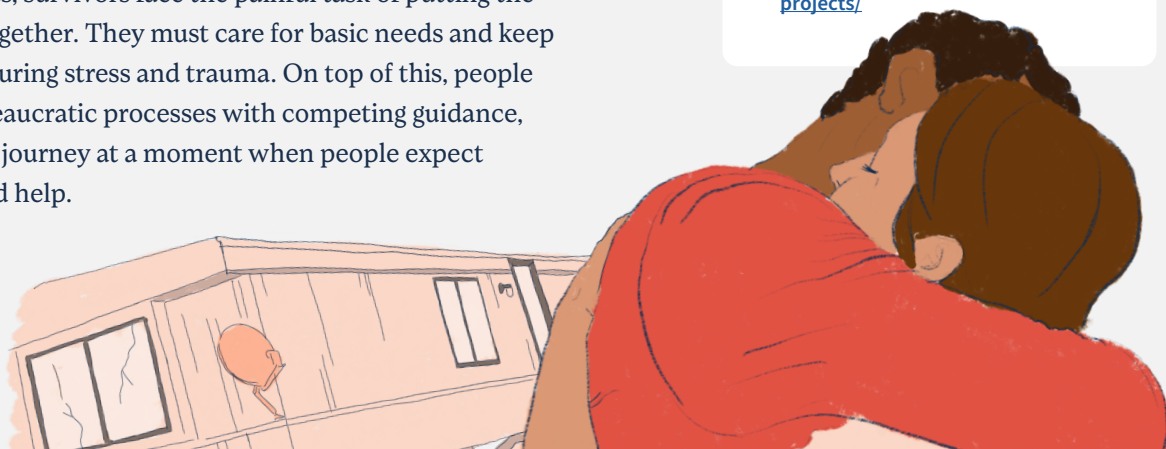
How might we provide a less frustrating and more dignified recovery experience for disaster survivors?

An increasing number of Americans face natural disasters each year, yet they often lack the support necessary to fully recover.

When a natural disaster hits, survivors face the painful task of putting the pieces of their lives back together. They must care for basic needs and keep businesses going while enduring stress and trauma. On top of this, people must manage multiple bureaucratic processes with competing guidance, a confusing and frustrating journey at a moment when people expect government to show up and help.

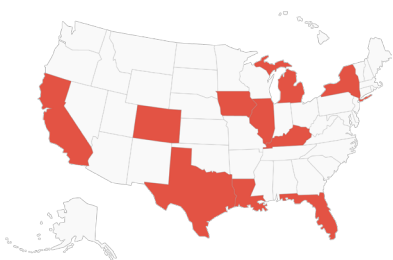
Executive Order 14058 directs the Federal government to identify “life experiences” that require interactions with multiple Federal agencies. Too often, people have to navigate a web of government websites, offices, and phone numbers to access the services they depend on. Government needs to better design and deliver services to meet people’s needs in these moments.

Learn more about this work at:
<https://www.performance.gov/cx/projects/>



The team spoke with:

43 survivors
22 frontline staff
16 government / nonprofit staff



The team conducted interviews in-person, virtually, in English, and in Spanish. Participants included people from twelve states and territories who have experienced hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires—including low-income renters and home owners, parents, the elderly, new immigrants, veterans, and people with disabilities.

To start, we listened to people’s stories.

The team spoke with people nationwide about this moment in their lives and where the government process could have been simpler and more helpful. The listening sessions captured honest conversations about people’s experiences, candid feedback on what could have worked better, and what really made a difference for them.

We learned about some of the biggest pain points we have the opportunity to address:

PAIN POINT

Burdensome application process

Survivors apply for help and request services from multiple agencies and aid organizations—a repetitive, tiresome, and often re-traumatizing process that takes time and attention away from other recovery tasks.

PAIN POINT

Inconsistent information

Many survivors find government websites, printed materials, and interactions with agency field staff inconsistent or uncoordinated. The quality of recovery information varies depending on the staff person or communication channel that a survivor encounters.

PAIN POINT

Lack of business-specific support

Some survivors find there is a lack of guidance and support focused solely on small business owners. Many loan-focused options have inequitable eligibility requirements or are hard to understand.

Learn more about this work at:
<https://www.performance.gov/cx/projects/recovering-from-a-disaster/>



Story Excerpts

These story excerpts are composite representations of the actual people the team spoke with. The quotes and stories come directly from these conversations, but names have been changed.

Experience Milestones

Preparing for
a Disaster

Surviving a
Disaster

Searching for
Assistance

Navigating
Assistance

Coping with
Ongoing Trauma

Cristina

Nursing assistant
Hurricane survivor
Mobile home owner



"I just sort of remember sitting down and filling out a bunch of forms. [It was] confusing because we weren't sure what the point of it was, we didn't know what we were getting, but they told us to sign up for this stuff, so we did."



Jordan

Nonprofit administrator
Tornado survivor
Renter



"I [a renter] was told I had to apply for an SBA loan if we wanted to be reimbursed for lost property. FEMA told us we had to be denied by SBA first. When I called for help, I was told, 'We're just customer service, we don't really know.'"



Linda

Childcare center owner
Wildfire survivor
Home owner



"One of the hard parts of being a business owner is that everyone is struggling from a personal perspective, especially your employees. They had no power, they had to go find food. It was a survival thing."

